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AN ORATION

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PURSUANT TO APPOINTMENT.

BY J. K. MITCHELL, M. D.

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ORATION.

ALTHOUGH encouraged by your flattering invitation to appear before you on this occasion, I feel heavily the burden of the task which that invitation requires me to perform.—To do justice to *any* subject, before such an audience, demands powers which it were presumption in me to claim: and yet, to fall far short of your expectations, were to throw discredit on your discernment in the selection you have made. Believing, however, that I owe this enviable station chiefly to your personal regard, I am less unwilling to deliver to you as friends, what I should fear to expose to you as critics.

The progress of Medicine during the past year, does not present a spectacle sufficiently striking to occupy your time to advantage. I have, therefore, preferred the more useful theme of *medical ethics*.

As it is my design to devote the greater part of the time allotted me, to the consideration of the *abuses* which prevail in the profession, I shall be denied the pleasure of *dwelling* at length on the more pleasing subject of professional intelligence and virtue. I do not prefer this course from a belief that censure is more useful than praise; but because the gentlemen who have preceded me in office, have dwelt chiefly on the fair side of the medical character, and have left unnoticed many of the spots which sully its brightness.

It is conceded that no other profession demands greater original intellectual powers, or a more studious mental cultivation than the science of medicine. Nor is there any other art which in its turn tends to improve the mind more than the daily exercise of medical duties. Knowledge and the intellec-

tual faculties are, in the mind of an enlightened physician, in a constant state of action and reaction, and must, according to an immutable law of nature, increase the energy of the thinking principle. I might, in this place, paint in the glowing colours of truth, the great intellectual dignity of our art, and enumerate the high pre-requisites, and the elaborate cultivation, necessary to the successful and honourable pursuit of the practice of medicine. But this has been already performed by a more skilful hand.

It remains for me to view, in a cursory manner, the natural influence of the study and *practice* of medicine on the sentiments, and to expose the evil tendency of professional abuses.

There is a sickliness of sentimentality, which weeps over a tale of misery, and yet turns with disgust from the sight of real suffering, or *bribes* it to depart from the view. Such cannot long continue to be the feeling of the *physician*. "*Passive impressions* become progressively weaker by frequent recurrence;" hence, our horror, disgust, and morbid sensibility at spectacles of squalid misery, are repressed and almost extinguished. But as *active propensities* are cultivated and confirmed by the frequent repetition of the circumstances which excite them, the natural tendency of our profession must be favourable to the developement of the most exalted species of benevolence. So necessary did the great Hippocrates conceive the virtue of humanity to the character of the physician, that he inquired, respecting the student of medicine, "Does he suffer with the sufferings of others? Does he naturally feel the tenderest commiseration for the woes incident to his fellow mortals? If so, you may reasonably infer that he will be passionately devoted to an art, that will instruct him in what manner to afford them relief."

In most countries physicians have charge of the poor solely in hospitals and other public institutions; and such are usually intrusted to the management of men who have attained to eminence. But in this country, the youngest practitioner of medicine enjoys the high privilege of healing the wounds, and administering to the wants of those who have an omnipotent

and liberal paymaster. He is called by his interest and desire for improvement to offer his services to the poor, among whom he may acquire skill and knowledge, whilst he is smoothing the pillow of disease, and lightening the load of misery.—“Sickness, complicated with poverty, has pleas, that to a feeling heart, are irresistible.” Obeying the generous impulse of nature, supported in the fatiguing and often loathsome task by sense of duty and love of knowledge, he may exclaim with the orator, “*Nihil habet fortuna majus quam ut possim, nec fortuna melius quam ut velim servare quamplurimos.*”

“Where'er his Maker's image dwells,
In gilded roofs or smoky cells,
The same his zeal; o'erjoy'd to save
His fellow creatures from the grave;
For well his soul can understand
The poor man's call is God's command.”

SOMERVILLE.

Nor is the duty of serving the poor contemptible or ignoble. The only miracle having reference to money, is that by which tribute was given to Cæsar—and no miracle is recorded by which any one was raised to rank or distinction. The great pattern of moral excellence, whilst employed in affording miraculous proofs of his power and goodness, directed them to the relief of the physical and mental diseases chiefly of the *poor*. Never then turn a deafened ear to the cry of sickness loaded with poverty, but remember, that although the feeble voice of the friendless beggar may not reach the ear of the public, God looks on the deed, and views with abhorrence him who adds to sickness and want the bitterness of unmerited neglect. But why should I caution you against such enormity? The history of medicine affords abundant proof of the unceasing exertions of physicians in the service of the poor. Galen speaking of Hippocrates observes, “There was but one sentiment in his soul, and that was the love of doing good, and in the course of his long life but a single act, and that was the relieving the sick.” Sydenham practiced chiefly among the

poor; and Boerhaave used to say that he esteemed the poor his best patients, "for God is their paymaster." Why should I not hold forth to your noblest emulation, the examples of Rush, of Wistar, and the many other medical worthies who have employed their best talents in acts of benevolence, and have been characterized as the friends of the poor. That great ethical writer, Dr. Samuel Johnson, used to say, "that physicians did more good to mankind, without a prospect of reward than any profession of men whatever."

In the faithful discharge of the duties of his profession, the practitioner is often compelled by the urgent wants of his patients to extend to them pecuniary assistance. Acts of charity become a necessary part of his daily avocations, and an habitual liberality characterizes his conduct. Whatever may be the *natural* tendency of his mind, the physician who gives *time* must give *money* also to the poor, and if he were disposed to avarice, must suffer his original propensity to fade before the cultivated influence of an habitual virtue. He who is compelled by any cause whatever, to make very frequent disbursements in early life, is in little danger of sinking into the sordid mire of covetousness, whilst one having but little natural tendency to cupidity, may, no appeals being made to his liberality, become a *very miser*. As this absorbing vice, always a hardener of the heart, fades not like other passions in the dim twilight of life, but glows most fiercely in the bosom of age, we should rejoice that in the ordinary duties of our profession we are furnished with means of quenching its ardour, and of finally extinguishing it.

"For Oh! what man's condition can be worse
Than his whom plenty starves and blessings curse.
The beggar does a common fate deplore,
The *rich* poor man's *emphatically* poor."

COWLEY.

There is also a natural tendency in medical duties to sustain and increase our affection for our fellow creatures. Ethical writers present no truth more readily adopted than that which

affirms that man is disposed to love objects on which he has expended much labour. The affection of parents for their children is augmented as they advance in life, chiefly by the constant habit of bestowing kindness. It is the highest and purest species of affection, and one which may reasonably be supposed to reside in the bosom of the "Giver of all good gifts."

"But Godlike his unwearied bounty flows,
He loves to do, then loves the good he does."

DENHAM.

The *usual* pursuits of a physician, are acts of benevolence : his time is spent in soothing sorrow, allaying pain, bestowing health and all the joys of health ; in giving the child to its parents, the parent to his children ; in restoring the strength of the many links of affection which, but for his instrumentality, had been broken forever. If the man who pursues such a course have not his affections softened, improved, and purified by his duties, then is he formed of sterner stuff than common mortals, and loses the sweetest and purest of enjoyments,

"The *luxury* of doing good."

Some clouds it is true are thrown over the brightness of this prospect by the certainty that we must often meet with an unworthy return for our greatest kindness. "Hippocrates complained of the fatigues of his profession, the unjust censures to which it exposed him, and of the ingratitude of the public towards those who exercise it with most zeal and ability. He declares, that in the course of a long life which had been devoted to the service of his fellow creatures, and which had not passed without some degree of renown, he had been oftener blamed for misconduct than praised for success." Dr. Rush used to say that those persons seldom employed him in their subsequent prosperity, who had been obliged to him for the *gratuitous* exertion of his skill, in hours of adversity. Be it so, and fair indeed must have been the lot of that man among you who has not had often to lament ill-requited good offices,

and forgotten kindness. But shall we suffer ourselves to be seduced into neglect of duty by the ingratitude of the world? Surely not! More disinterested will he be who, in his painful professional labours looks not for even this reward. Although this pleasing recompense be denied him, he has yet to experience the approbation of his own conscience, the applause of good men, and when acting from proper motives, the approving smile of heaven. If these be not noble and delightful objects for which to contend, what is there on earth that can offer a suitable incentive to action?

Nearly all the writers on medical ethics concur with the world in fixing on our profession the brand of irreligion. The more, however, we reflect on the education and ordinary duties of the physician, the more must we be surprised at this charge, since we cannot help perceiving that they ought to produce the opposite effect. I cannot believe truth to be seen less clearly by men whose minds have been expanded by knowledge and strengthened by exercise,—whose highest sentiments have been refined and exalted, whose lives are devoted to the service of humanity, and who are tempted rather to *good* than to *evil*. Can he have less exalted views of the glory and grandeur of the Deity, who is engaged in contemplating the wonders of the starry heavens, the secrets of the mighty deep, the beauty and usefulness of the productions of the earth? Can true philosophy, which consists in a more intimate acquaintance with the works of God, lessen our conceptions of his greatness, or our gratitude for his goodness? Can the physician who has studied with deep attention the wonderful frame which contains his soul—the most complex of the works of the Creator—believe, that its numerous and intricate organs were *united* in their efforts for the support of life, by the “fortuitous concourse of atoms?” If his heart be not steeled against the evidence of truth, he must behold in the existence of remedies for the many terrible physical evils which man drags down upon himself, substantial proofs that God is *merciful* as well as *powerful*, *good* as well as *great*.

That such is the *natural* tendency of the profession of medicine may be made evident by reflecting that those who have been justly celebrated for their philosophical skill and medical usefulness have been very commonly humble and sincere believers. What names stand preeminent in the history of medicine? are they not the names of Parré, Sydenham, Boërhaave, Botalus, Cullen, Cheselden, Fothergill, Rush, Hoffman, Stahl, Hartley, Percival, &c. &c. And were not these great men as much distinguished for piety as for skill and talent? Dr. Rush, in speaking of the religion of physicians, makes the remark, “that the weight of such names alone in favour of revelation, is sufficient to turn the scale against all the infidelity that has ever dishonoured the science of medicine.” We should be wary then of admitting this unfounded charge against the character of our art, lest we unjustly impair the reputation of a science with which are associated our fondest hopes and our dearest interests. We should also rejoice to learn, that to enter, in a proper spirit, on the pursuit of our profession, to cultivate knowledge with diligence, and to apply it with skill and industry, is to increase our reputation and real respectability, to enhance our virtue, to enlarge our understanding, and to lead us to more sublime conceptions of the glory, and more heartfelt admiration of the goodness of God.

But whilst the study of nature enlarges our conceptions of the greatness and power of the Ruler of the universe, it represents superstition. Why are mankind less superstitious in our time, but because they are better instructed than their progenitors? So, the more enlightened we become, the less liable are we to the intrusion of idle dreams and visionary fears.

Time will not permit a full display of the many virtues which are cultivated by the pursuits of the physician. Secrecy, honourable integrity, great self-denial, patience, decision of character, and mildness of manner, are demanded by the public, in the character of the practitioner of medicine. His interest, in these things, coincides with his duty. His very selfishness can be gratified only by acting well; and should he

begin to pursue such a course without good motives, the habitual performance of useful actions could scarcely fail to repress evil and nurture good principles. "A physician," says Hippocrates, "should be decent in his external deportment, his manner should be grave, and his conduct moderate. In the intimate relations in which he is placed by his profession with regard to the sex, it is incumbent on him to show great reserve and respect, and to have the sanction of his functions constantly before his eyes. He ought not to be envious nor unjust towards his brethren, nor absorbed in the love of gold. He ought to be modest, sober, patient, dexterous, and ready to perform every office appertaining to his art, without feeling in the least discomposed. He ought to be pious without superstition, and honest in all the affairs of common life, as well as in the exercises of his profession. In short, he ought to be a perfectly good man; and join to the purity of an upright heart, prudence, genius, talent, knowledge, and address, which alone can render the practical application of the rules of his art productive of real utility."

I stand not here as the unqualifying eulogist of our profession. Highly as I value its dignity and usefulness, its intellectual character, and its moral influence, still let me not be blinded to its faults. Like every sublunary institution, that of medicine is subject to evils, many of them common to it with other professions, and others which pertain exclusively to itself. Of these, some have of late become so burdensome as to attract the attention of the Society, and others are growing up into a consequence which threatens death to the future respectability of the profession.

I enter on this part of the subject with a full sense of the danger which I shall encounter of wounding the feelings of many, whom it will be far from my purpose to offend. But let me once for all declare, that in speaking of the errors and faults into which the profession is most liable to fall, I shall not point at any individual, nor give to any of my strictures a personal direction. Nor can I myself pretend to claim exemption from similar charges, since I cannot be certain that I do not unwittingly expose myself to cen-

sure from others for like transgressions. But if we are to be reminded of our faults solely by those who are free from blame, where shall we hear the voice of reproof, or from whom shall we receive the lessons of virtue. The light of heaven, however dimmed and discoloured by the media through which it passes, is still light, and truth remains truth when proclaimed even by an unworthy herald.

The increasing facilities for the acquisition of medical knowledge, by greatly increasing the number of well educated physicians, exposes the profession to some evils, which, although they may, at first sight, appear undeserving of notice, are yet, likely, if unchecked, to entirely destroy professional dignity and usefulness. It cannot escape your observation, that in many places, not increased in population or wealth, several physicians are competitors for the business which formerly occupied but one. And in places which *have* advanced in wealth and population, the number of practitioners of medicine has been augmented in a tenfold proportion. At all times desirous of an opportunity to employ his talent and learning for the benefit of his fellow creatures, the young physician may, in such situations, from the heedless ardour of his disposition, forget the justice which is due to his equals, and the deference and respect which it becomes him to pay to his professional superiors. The long probation, the tedious uniformity of a life of mere study, and a longing for active usefulness, are incentives to honourable competition; and when the desire for employment is aggravated by pecuniary distress, it demands unusual care and resolution, to avoid improper means of obtaining business.

Among the arts which have been used to obtain employment, may be mentioned that of labouring for a reward greatly disproportionate to the value of the services. In this manner self-constituted physicians and quacks, have, in all ages, endeavoured to recommend themselves to the notice of the public; but only recently have we learned that similar means have been resorted to by regularly educated practitioners of medicine. A vile system of underbidding begins to taint

the profession, and to rob it of its just and necessary reward. If persevered in, it will end in the total destruction of professional respectability, in our day, and will, in future, deter men of education and talent from entering into a profession which has been degraded into a mere *trade*, laborious, disgusting, and vexatious. Where is the profession most respected? Is it in countries where its services are justly appreciated, and properly rewarded, where the recompense is such as to tempt into its ranks minds of the highest order, strengthened by exercise, and improved by cultivation; or where the wages of the *trade* cannot afford even a comfortable subsistence. Where the whole soul is “swallowed in one low want,” and to satisfy the cravings of hunger, the whole time must be passed in the *active drudgery* of business? In Spain, physicians are in less esteem than the bleeders, leechers, and cuppers of this country, or than a cow-doctor in a village. “In point of honour,” says a modern traveller, “no class of citizens meets with less respect than the physicians. The science and practice of medicine are at the lowest ebb. The *emoluments* of the Spanish physician are as low as the rank in which he is held. Even in the present day, the fee of the physician is two pence from the tradesman, ten pence from the man of fashion, and (even here mark the liberality of the profession) nothing from the poor. Some of the noble families agree with a physician by the year, paying him annually fourscore reals, that is, sixteen shillings, for his attendance on them and their families. Of threescore physicians, settled at Barcelona, the two already named, are the most distinguished, and have the most extensive practice. One of them favoured me with a sight of his list. He had visited *more than forty* patients in the morning, and he was to see *as many more* before he went to bed. Among these were many merchants, manufacturers, and officers; yet he did not expect to receive a hundred reals, that is, twenty shillings, for the whole practice of the day.” What could science expect from a man so harassed, and so occupied? or what improvement may we anticipate from Spanish physicians? Have you ever *heard* of a good medical work, or valuable medical discovery, by a Spanish physician?

Believe not that the low and inadequate charges which you make when young, may be augmented as you advance in skill and experience. Those who *have* preceded you in this course, have not been able to obtain such an augmentation. Their own custom has been appealed to by their patients, who too often object to giving a moderate reward for services, which, when rendered, were esteemed of inestimable value.

Being exempted from pecuniary cares by the possession of ample fortunes, some physicians, from love of popularity, or from a careless habit, give, either gratuitously, or for an inadequate recompense, their services to the *rich*. By so doing, they compel their poorer and less eminent brethren, to follow their example, and without cause they inflict a severe wound on the profession. If they desire not a recompense beyond that afforded by the reflection that they have been usefully and humanely employed, let them give their time, their skill, and their superfluity to the *poor*, and they will enjoy a reward which every good man ought to covet.

To make *extravagant demands* on our patients, would be more degrading than to remain contented with a paltry pecuniary compensation. To preserve the profession from falling into either extreme, the college of physicians has adopted a rate of charges, which is thought to be as far removed from meanness on the one hand, as from extravagance on the other. It is also distinguished by liberally permitting a reduction according to the pecuniary circumstances of the patient, and in no case prohibits members from bestowing gratuitous services on the poor.

Another artifice for obtaining employment is the concealing and appropriating to one's exclusive benefit valuable medicinal remedies.

“The *worst* avarice is that of sense.”

No man enjoys the right to suffer useful knowledge in the science of medicine, either to lie concealed in his own bosom, or to perish. The antimonial febrifuge of the celebrated James, of London, was concealed for sordid purposes, and has, not-

withstanding its wonderful utility, been, it is feared, lost forever. Can any good physician withhold an invaluable gift from mankind, lest peradventure the disclosure of his secret should rob him of some advantages over his professional brethren. He must have degrading views of reputation, who is contented to be admired as the sole owner of a good medicine, rather than, by publishing his discovery, to obtain the approbation of his own conscience, and the honest fame arising from a great and disinterested action. I speak not to those who have not been admitted within the pale of professional privilege. With quacks I have no concern. The profession, or this Society, cannot exercise a control over men who are not members of either. It is also vain to *contend* against *nostrums*. There will always be charlatans while there is ignorance or superstition. The rage for novelty and the love of mystery must be gratified by a succession of “balms of Gilead.”

“Il y’a a quelque chose singulierement piquant dans le mystere.”

I have heard such concealment defended on the ground of professional competition. The disclosure of peculiar knowledge destroys, it is said, all claims to superiority; and, if not reciprocated, advances the interests of the artful and designing, to the disparagement of those of the candid and high-minded practitioner. Were all this true, a good man would prefer the path of rectitude, although leading through grounds roughened with rocks, interrupted by torrents, and beset with briers.—But, happily, no such difficulties or dangers encumber the way of truth and honour. Limited as is the sphere of my observation, I have been taught to believe that reputation must finally reward, and success follow the man, who, in our profession, acts on the broadest and soundest principles of virtue. A proper disregard of selfish ends, a fair and liberal behaviour to members of the profession, a ready communication of useful knowledge, tend to endear a man to his associates, and enforce respect and consideration even from his competitors. With whom would you prefer to associate and consult? With him

who exhibits no social feeling, no candour, no liberality ; who is enveloped in the mists of prejudice, and degraded by vicious principles—Or with him who in his whole professional deportment evinces how dearly he prizes the privilege of doing good, how earnestly he longs to acquire and *distribute* knowledge, and how solicitous he is to uphold the character of his brothers in medicine? “It is not acting,” says Sydenham, “the part of a *good* man to convert to his *private advantage* what might prove eminently serviceable to the public, nor of a *wise* man to deprive himself of the blessing he might justly expect from heaven, by endeavouring to promote the public good.”

In the ardour of medical competition, physicians have been, in some cases, associated collusively with apothecaries, in the pursuit of gain. I need scarcely dwell on the evils which may spring from such a combination. Associations of this kind can be formed but for *interested* purposes. The physician must either share in the profits of the sale of drugs, or find a compensation in the business which he acquires by the exertions and eulogies of the apothecary. In the one case, he is tempted by interest and a desire to perform *his* part of the compact, to prescribe, in part at least, for the purse of the apothecary rather than for the disease of the patient ; in the other, he submits to the indignity of being *patronized*, and that too, not from superior *merit*, but superior *cupidity*. Why did our medical predecessors discontinue the custom of keeping and vending medicine? Were they not convinced of the hurtful tendency of the practice? Did they not discover that to acquire a knowledge of the sensible qualities of medicine, and to prepare them for use, demanded such time and attention as could not be reasonably expected from them. Did they not know that a separation of pharmacy from the practice of medicine tended to simplify prescriptions, to save time and labour, and to afford to the patients, fresher and more efficient medicines?

This evil, new to us, and perhaps as yet remediable, has, in many parts of the old world, become so burdensome as to elicit the strong animadversions of the best medical writers.

In *England* these associations existed, and were felt as evils, even in the lifetime of Chaucer, for that poet says,

“ Full ready had he his apoticaries
To send him drugges and his lectuaries,
For each made other for to winne
Their friendship was not new to beginne.

PROLOGUE TO CANTURBURY TALES:

One contemptible artifice, which has originated in such compacts, is the writing prescriptions in cypher, so as to prevent any one but the favoured apothecary from reading them. Such prescriptions I have myself seen, and I know that the advice, in the case to which they related was given gratuitously to appearance, but was well paid for in the price of the medicine.

In alluding to such combinations, an eminent professor in Edinburgh, advises the introduction of the *undertaker* also. He says, “ I trust my learned brethren whose fingers itch for the pestle and mortar, will not condemn me for extending my views to the shroud, the coffin, and the hearse, for when the physician and apothecary combine,

“ *Ultima, mors coit in dulce sodalitiū.*”

“ In regard to *Pharmacy*,” says the eloquent and amiable Gregory, “ it were much to be wished, that those who make it their business, should have no connexion with the practice of physic, or that physicians should dispense their own medicines, and either not charge the expense at all, or charge it at prime cost. It is only in one or other of these ways that we can ever hope to see that simplicity of prescription take place in the practice of medicine, which all who understand its real interests so ardently desire. And it is only from such an arrangement that we can expect to see physicians placed in that honourable independence which subjects them to no attentions but such as tend to the improvement of their art.”

Not contented with the great profits which are obtained by

the sale of medicines, nor satisfied with the easy and lucrative trade which has been abandoned to them by the physicians, some apothecaries have recently commenced the practice of medicine. If it be deemed unworthy of the dignity, and dangerous to the integrity of educated physicians to act as their own apothecaries, what should be said of the apothecary, who ventures to throw into a system of which he knows nothing, medicines of whose *virtues* he knows as little.

"So modern 'pothecaries, taught the art
By doctor's bills to play the doctor's part,
Bold in the practice of mistaken rules,
Prescribe, apply, and call their masters fools."

POPE.

"From files a *random* recipe they take,
And many deaths of one *prescription* make."

DRYDEN.

From such beginning arose the practice, now nearly universal in England, of employing apothecaries in all common cases of disease. In more important and dangerous maladies the physician is summoned, and intrusts to the apothecary directions as to the management of the patient. As the apothecary is always the first in attendance, he is commonly permitted to select the consulting physician, and therefore exercises, over the professional men in his neighbourhood, no inconsiderable influence. If not possessed of great eminence, a physician is, in some parts of England, entirely dependent for employment on the good will of the apothecaries, and must therefore form his prescriptions so as to favour the interest of his *patrons*, or live and die unknown and in poverty. Yielding to such stern necessity, the English physicians recommend exceedingly complex formulæ, as may be seen by referring to "Thomas's Practice," and other British publications. Recent events inspire me with a belief that *we* are in danger of falling into a similar degradation;—And, for our own sakes, as well as for the interests of society, and the dignity of the profession, we should earnestly seek for a remedy. As far as its

influence extends the College, of Pharmacy has, with great propriety, discountenanced collusion between physicians and apothecaries, and the application, by its members, of medicines to diseases. Without an effort, however, on the part of the *profession*, to repress these evils, they will inevitably sap the foundations of professional dignity and usefulness. But if we resolve to give countenance to no collusion between physicians and apothecaries, and refuse to send prescriptions to those who administer medicines without proper qualifications, we shall crush the evil in its germ, and rescue the profession and society from a fatal disorder. If this be not done, then must we endure the lesser evil, and rather than suffer apothecaries to become *incompetent physicians*, let physicians become *incompetent apothecaries*. It might be supposed that the *good sense* of the *public* would prevent the extension of the evils complained of, and that the educated part of the community would prefer, the skill which has been acquired, by years of enlightened application. Men trust not themselves to the pilot who has not served an apprenticeship to his trade, nor will they consign their fortunes to the management of a skillless lawyer: but their lives, they are not unwilling to place in the hands of mountebanks and pretenders to medicine. “Nay,” says the shrewd and observant Lord Bacon, “we see the weakness and credulity of men is such, as they will often prefer a mountebank or *witch* before a learned physician. And therefore the poets were clear sighted in discerning this folly when they made Æsculapius and Circe brother and sister, both children of the sun.

Ipse repertorem medicinæ talis èt artis

Fulmine Phœbigenam Stygias detrusit ad undas.

ÆN. VII. 772.

And again,

Dives inaccessos ubi solis filia &c.

IB. VII. 11.

For in all times in the opinion of the multitude, witches and

old women, and impostors have had a competition with physicians ; and what followeth ? Even this ; that physicians say to themselves, as Solomon expresseth it upon a higher occasion ; ‘ If it befall to me, as befalleth to fools, why should I labour to be more wise.’ ”

The slow progress of the medical art, is a subject of wonder and regret, not only to the profession itself, but also to every thinking mind. Distinguished among the sciences for its lofty aims, its high requirements in its cultivators, and its consecration to the service of humanity, and the security of life, why is not its advancement equal to that of the other branches of natural knowledge ? Are not its votaries learned, scientific, industrious, zealous and observant ? Do they not pursue their investigations, in the midst of pestilence, and in the abodes of wretchedness ? From the dark recesses of the *tomb*, they strive to elicit the light of truth, and to bring death himself to the bar of observation, to give evidence by which his future ravages may be prevented,

“ Hic locus est ubi mors gaudet succurrere vitæ.”

Why then is our art yet so imperfect ; our science so little deserving of the name ? Many useful medical discoveries have been made by chance ; and have been brought into repute by the prattle of old women, or the puffs of quacks. Some, and these but few, have been presented to the art, by the hand of philosophy ; and for these gifts, doubly valuable, because they give promise of a richer harvest, we are indebted chiefly to the *present age*. To discover the cause of this lamentable condition of our art, it will be useful to revert to the early periods of medical history. Anterior to the era of Hippocrates, we know scarcely any thing concerning the state of medicine. The little we do know, gives reason to suppose, that this useful art was intrusted to the hands of women, priests, and warriors, who could learn nothing beyond the empirical application of a few remedies. In the hands of Hippocrates, the science sprang

into a consequence and usefulness, the more remarkable, because of its previous insignificance, and its subsequent retardation. By what means was this highly distinguished physician enabled to produce so prodigious a result? By means exceedingly simple and natural. Founded on experience and observation, medicine can be successfully cultivated, only by the patient interrogation of nature. But to extort confessions from nature, the mind must be previously prepared both to inquire aright and to understand with facility. Educated in all the knowledge of the time, and having his mind acuminated by the intellectual philosophy of Greece, Hippocrates sat himself down to patiently observe, and record, the phenomena of disease. In that country, and at that period, his was no easy task. His cotemporaries, enchanted with the gorgeous visions of genius, dwelt in the airy regions of conjecture. The purely intellectual sciences were their delight; and them they carried to a distinguished degree of excellence. But in the departments of knowledge, which are founded on observation, and slow and painful induction, they chose rather to think, than to observe. They disdained to interrogate nature; and preferred rather to dictate to her. They were less desirous of deducing principles from facts, than of inferring facts from principles. They assumed the office of the *Creator*, and said, "let such things be," and to the intellectual darkness of the age, they hung aloft the light of a ruinous sophistry. The father of medicine, though infected in some degree, with the conjecturing spirit of the times, was most commonly employed in observation and experiment. It had been well for his fame, and the advancement of medicine, if his powerful talents had always been employed in the humble, but instructive task of listening to nature, whose testimony is ever to be trusted. He did not often search for truth with the feeble taper of conjecture, but delighted to view her in the less deceptive light of observation. Hence his pictures of disease shine even yet in the fresh and glowing colours of truth, and have faded only where they have been touched by the unreal pencil of conjecture. But having proved himself capable of

deducing sublime truths from the great phenomena of nature, he sometimes voluntarily closed his eyes, and preferred splendid dreams to useful, but less imposing realities. It was preconception, sitting *incubus-like* on the bosom of philosophy. Let us not however be wanting in charity to this failing of genius. Preconception rules with tyrannic sway in even the noblest minds. Socrates himself, sacrificed a cock to *Æsculapius*.

That fatal philosophy which sometimes dimmed the mind of the sage, shed its baneful influence on the art, in succeeding time. As long as it kept possession of the schools, so long did our useful art groan under its impairing influence. That philosophy has, thanks be to heaven, perished, and medicine has claimed for itself the privilege of a separate existence. But is it no longer the subject of *preconception*? Do we not suffer facts to be distorted, as seen through the medium of prejudice, and are we not ever employed in system building? The toilsome path of induction, suits neither the indolence nor the vanity of man: and even the greatest physicians, have been guilty of erecting hypotheses on unlawful grounds, and forcing or suborning facts, to give evidence in their favour. But for this wresting from their proper purpose, the phenomena of nature, and distorting them hideously and fatally by reflection from the delusive mirror of fancy, it would be a waste of time to quarrel with the dreams of physicians. When however we see our noble and useful science retarded; when we see the most highly gifted mortals, wasting time and energy, in concealing truth and disguising knowledge; when the youthful pupil wades amidst a mingled mass of truth and falsehood, without any discriminating guide, and the practiced physician reads, with a wholesome and cautious scepticism, have we not *reason* to lash the odious spirit which broods over, and binds in chains, the fair form of truth?

Shall we not then be permitted to *reason* in medicine? Are we to be denied the privilege of thinking? By no means! To practice medicine well, it must be practiced rationally.

"Medicine without principles is an humble art, and a degrading occupation."

RUSH.

No man can carry in his mind all the facts of his science, but must be permitted to deduce principles, which, when properly formed, are but general facts including a number of particular facts. The science is not yet prepared for a more extensive system, and we must yet confine ourselves to short and simple trains of inductive reasoning.

Men sufficiently gifted to invent and support medical hypotheses, are not numerous, although their influence is commonly extensive; but there are other motives for falsifying, which are felt by a much greater number of physicians. Among these, interest and vanity are the most powerful and injurious. The most contemptible practitioner may be a boaster, and even a publisher of falsehoods, not to advance or adorn a hypothesis, but to obtain reputation and profit. Who is there among you who has not been bitterly disappointed by the effects of some highly vaunted remedy? And have not those who are instructed by long experience, been taught to apply new medicines, or modes of practice, with extreme doubt and jealous circumspection. How few of the many boasted remedies of the day have been found useful, and how many of them have been sent on errands of destruction. Nor have we to complain alone of the *positively* injurious influence of such medicines; they more frequently do injury by superseding and excluding, better established methods of cure, and by delay, often cause the death of the patient. It is time to find some remedy for this *growing* evil, and to purge the profession of that "perilous stuff" which weighs most heavily on its reputation and its usefulness. Such a remedy cannot be found in legislative enactments, nor in the regulations of any ordinary medical association. But might be obtained by an institution whose members should pledge themselves solemnly to support a just and upright character, and to which should be given the power of inflicting the severe penalty of degradation and professional outlawry.

No man can advantageously publish a medical discovery,

until its value has been tested by an extensive series of observations. Before, therefore, it is placed, by its discoverer, in the eye of the public, it is commonly known to many professional men, and is in danger of being claimed by some one who is desirous of reputation at *any* cost. The plundering of his reputation a man who is alive and able to assert his right, is not, however, so contemptible a crime as the descending into the tomb, and robbing the illustrious dead of *their* honours. The almost daily contentions for the honour of discoveries, evinces that in some cases, we snatch the laurels from each other. The frequent restoration of the credit of a discovery to some departed being, shows either a culpable degree of ignorance, or a base desire to wear honours justly due to another. But there is allied nearly to this evil, one much more common and much more injurious to the progress of the science of medicine. I mean, a restless and heartless jealousy of those who make discoveries. There must be some enthusiasm in an inventor, to enable him to overcome the many inevitable difficulties in the way of a new conception. But a much more serious obstacle is presented by the envy of professional competitors. At first, the discovery is undervalued, and ruthless endeavours are made to strangle it in *embryo*. When, by the zeal, talent, and courage of its owner, it is forced into estimation, it is subjected to another assault. Either it is claimed by some impudent pretender, or it is traced to an unintelligible passage in some worm-eaten folio, whose author had as clear a conception of the fact, as he had of the nature of the soil in the moon.

I am willing to believe, that the *greater part* of my brethren are not tainted with this odious and blighting vice. *Some* there are who are ever ready to cheer and guide the young adventurer in his path to fame and usefulness, and who are above all jealousy of their associates; who disdaining

“To crush young genius bursting from the shell,”

would exclaim, even of a rival and an enemy,

"Freely let him wear

The wreaths which genius wove and planted there,

Foe as I am, should envy tear it down,

Myself would labour to replace the crown."

There are gentlemen in our profession, whose chief delight consists in urging onward the young adventurer, and who strive to "Strew with flowers the thorny ways of truth." If I could think otherwise, I should be forgetful of kindness and assistance, which I could not forget without dishonour.

But, *my time* and *your patience* are too nearly exhausted to permit the farther disclosure of the evils prevalent in the profession. It is at best an ungrateful and invidious task, and one, which, I fear, will accomplish little good. But odious as it is, let me not be understood to express regret at the exposure. Love of approbation is among the most deeply rooted and wide-spreading of sentiments, and therefore men usually conform their conduct to the opinions of the community to which they belong. Raise the tone of moral sentiment, and there is produced a proportional elevation of the conduct of those who are actuated, not by reason or religion, but who swim with the general current of society, either to evil or to good. My *feeble* voice may not be listened to by many, and fewer still may give heed to my counsel, or regard my reproaches; but public sentiment being produced by the aggregation of individual opinion, it becomes the imperious duty of even the most insignificant, to give his suffrage to the authority of truth, and to the elevation of virtue.

If then the influence of the sentiments of those who are in obscurity, may be felt by the medical community; how great must be the responsibility of those whose genius, talent, age, and experience, have elevated them to the highest pinnacle of public observation. To them are most specially intrusted the interests of the profession, and their example must regulate, in a great measure, the conduct and character of those who are to follow them. Their actions are not alone a *personal* concern, nor are they entitled to exercise a discretion founded *solely* on their own interest and that of their patients. The

general welfare of the society should be consulted by every individual ; and no man should forget the obligations imposed on him by the claims of the *profession* to which he *belongs*. In this *latter* particular, more than in any other, do physicians fail in their duty. While the members of the profession are ever ready, *by individual exertion*, to advance the cause of virtue and the interests of humanity, how seldom do we find them *united* in schemes for the improvement of either. Look at the many medical associations which have sprung into existence, enjoyed a short and sickly career, and *perished*. Even this useful Society, before which I now stand, once dignified by the presence, and graced by the genius and eloquence of the Hippocrates and Sydenhams of our country ; once enlightened by the knowledge, and improved by the experience of the greatest men of the profession, is now abandoned to the feeble, but still zealous support of those, who, too inexperienced to sustain it in all its greatness, hope that its sun of glory, obscured for a season, may again shine forth in its wonted splendour. Reflecting on the injustice of withholding from their brethren, the valuable knowledge which accumulates in their enlightened minds, eminent physicians will, once more, we trust, delight the Medical Society, by the lessons of skill and the precepts of wisdom. Knowledge, exhibited in books, is, no doubt, useful ; but with much greater force and impressiveness does it flow from the eloquent lips of a *living speaker*.

The greater part of my audience consists of gentlemen who are not yet admitted into the ranks of the profession. In proper time, all of you will, I fondly trust, receive the honourable distinction of a degree in medicine, and feel that you deserve it. Let me entreat you, before your minds are burdened with, what may be termed, habitual professional faults, to resolve to enter on the high and responsible duties of your art, in the true spirit of philanthropy, illuminated by philosophy. The fate of the physician is often determined by the manner in which he commences his career. If he fail to attain to respect and usefulness, he may usually reproach only himself. Unless some unforeseen and unusual occurrence blast his prospects, and con-

trol his destiny, the man who acts well his part, must obtain competency, reputation, a wider and wider field of usefulness, and a loftier and still loftier elevation of character.

If, seduced by the restlessness and impatience of youth, the sordid love of gain, or the inordinate desire for reputation, the young physician evince no regard to the reputation, interest, and feelings of his professional brethren, he will soon discover that he has, like the Laplander, unchained a tempest which he cannot allay, and which will eventually overwhelm himself.

Let him not extenuate his fault by pleading the irksomeness of inaction, and the desire to be usefully employed. He should not remain inactive, nor should he seat himself, and wait with folded arms for the hour of exertion in the field of practice. One or two trials of his skill will convince him, that he has learned little more than the names of the tools of his trade. It will be necessary for him to study, and that profoundly too, their *uses*. That leisure which is found so often burdensome, is for this purpose, inestimable. Let him employ it in laying more *firmly* the foundations of medical knowledge, by consulting and comparing the opinions of illustrious men in all ages, and storing his mind with the accumulated experience of centuries. Let him associate with his seniors, and consult them, in a spirit of *proper* deference, on points not well explained by writers.

In the experimental investigation of *physiology*, he may often find a noble resource against the tedium of inaction. That department of science is yet in its infancy, though destined to become the parent of pathology. In its cultivation may be acquired the calmness and dexterity so essential to the surgeon, the knowledge of the natural condition of organs and functions, so useful to the pathologist, and a reputation greater than can be obtained by any other medical pursuit. It possesses also the merit of being accessible in every place. Animals are easily found, and the apparatus for the investigation is simple. Let not your thirst for knowledge be repressed by the common *cant*, against the cruelty of such pursuits. Animals *do* suffer under the knife of the physiologist, but useful knowledge is

promoted by their sufferings. Only *useless* or *unnecessary* infliction of pain should be branded with the name of cruelty.—The lower animals were given to man for his *use*; and do we not use them more conformably to the will of the *Giver*, when we extract from them knowledge, than when, to gratify a low and pampered appetite, we crush millions of them at a mouthful?

The detection of the useful proximate principles of our best remedies has of late greatly improved our means of cure, and given a particular brilliancy to the French School of Medicine. These astonishing effects have been produced by means easy of attainment, and of great simplicity. Every physician may learn to perform the necessary processes, and may discover in our wide savannas, and interminable forests, an exhaustless field of research. Here he may find a refuge from *ennui*, and a cure for impatience; useful employment and valuable knowledge, personal improvement and professional greatness.

Nor should he be entirely debarred from the practical application of his knowledge. If the wealthy will not employ him, let him seek in the abodes of poverty for opportunities of exercising his benevolence, and correcting by practice, the errors in his medical reasonings.

The rich stores of knowledge which must open before the eyes of men thus employed, should not be hoarded for mean or selfish ends. Let them go forth to the *world*!—Lose a temporary and immediate advantage, to gain a distant, but an imperishable renown! Let not enlightening views of science, given as a distinction to the man, and as a blessing to society, be hoarded in a selfish mind, to sit at no distant period, “heavy on the soul.”

Above all, gentlemen, cultivate a constant and friendly intercourse with all worthy physicians. Lay the foul fiend of professional rivalry and medical jealousy. *Know* your brothers in medicine, and you will *love* them. Promote such institutions as have a tendency to bring you together, and to unite you in a common cause. A little resolution, a little forbearance will be necessary to commence the great work of medical

reformation: but once fairly begun, it will, I trust, advance as near to perfection as is consistent with our fallen nature. Already may be perceived an improvement in professional character. The great political institutions of our country leave us to the unfettered pursuit of virtue and knowledge. No hereditary aristocracy frowns on plebeian merit; no solitary master scatters around him honours won and worn by fawning sycophants and flattering minions. The streams of knowledge are not directed solely to the palace. They overflow the *land*. He who drinks deeply of the inspiring beverage, shall not complain that his aspirations after fame are repressed by the hand of power, or his desire to rush into the field of useful virtue thwarted by the arm of privilege.

Such blessings were not given to us, I trust, in vain. The institutions under which we live demand from us an adequate return. Our minds were not liberated from the fetters of tyrannic authority, to be enthralled by indolence, enslaved by passion, and dishonoured by cupidity. The profession has also *its* claims. The souls of our brethren were not ennobled by liberty, expanded by science, and softened by the hourly exercise of humanity, to make them less worthy of our confidence, less deserving of our affection, and less amiable as friends and associates. Shall the ministers of differing sects combine in a common cause? Shall men, of other professions, be distinguished for great *esprit de corps*, and physicians alone be disgraced by disunion? Henceforth let us act in unison, and *unite* in efforts to elevate and dignify our art. Let us oppose with *the whole weight of the profession*, the infringement of the rules of virtue, and the principles of honour. Let us encourage a generous emulation in the cultivation of science, and whilst solicitous to become ourselves distinguished, be ever ready to do justice to the merit of others, and to assert their lawful claims to distinction.